

A guide to
Private Renting

*Help for prospective tenants searching
for private rented accommodation*



Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	3
<i>What to consider when looking for private rented accommodation</i>	4
<i>Where to look for private rented accommodation</i>	6
<i>What type of accommodation is out there?</i>	8
<i>Finding a room to rent</i>	9
<i>What to do once you find a property you are interested in</i>	11
<i>Top tips for a successful viewing</i>	12
<i>Final Word</i>	14

Introduction

This leaflet is to support your search for private rented accommodation. Depending on your current circumstances there are a range of factors you should consider at this time, but it is important that you establish which are the most essential right now, and those which can be achieved by a move of address in the future.

It is important that you are as open minded as possible when looking for private rented accommodation, both with the area you could move to and the type of accommodation available.



What should I be considering?

It is useful to take a moment to make some preparations before you begin your search for accommodation. Making a note of your answers regarding the following criteria will help to maximise your efforts, and you can communicate this clearer to those who offer to help you:

What sort of home am I looking for?

- How many rooms do I need?
- Do I need a garden?
- Do I need a ground floor?

Where can I live?

- Do I need to be near a place of work or school?
- What public transport is available nearby?
- Do I need to be near a source of support?
- What is the maximum distance I could manage?

What rental charge can I afford?

- If you are on a low income you may be able to claim Housing Benefit/ Universal Credit Housing Costs. You can contact the council team directly or use the online calculator on the council's website to gauge your potential entitlement.
- You should be looking for a property priced within the Local Housing Allowance. This is the maximum rent considered for benefits.

How much will it cost to run the property?

- It is important to consider the size of the accommodation you move to as this will impact the amount it costs to run the home. An EPC rating will give a good guide to whether a home would be expensive to heat in winter months.
- Some utilities may be included in the rent.
- You may be able to claim Council Tax Support if you are liable for this charge.

What financial assistance is available to secure a property?

- Some properties require payment for holding fees or referencing. You should put some money aside to pay for these whilst you are looking for accommodation.
- Some properties require a guarantor; you should consider asking a family member to act as a guarantor, as this will increase the number of properties available to you.
- In some cases, if you are already claiming Housing Benefit you may be able to claim a Discretionary Housing Payment to pay Rent in Advance.
- You may meet the criteria for assistance from the Housing Team for a Tenancy Bond/ Deposit to secure a property. You should speak with a Housing Advisor about this.
- If you are already receiving support from a charity or have a connection to the Armed Forces, you may be able to ask for financial assistance from these sources. You should speak to a Housing Advisor about this.



Where to look for private rented accommodation

Properties and rooms are mostly advertised on the internet now, although it may still be worth approaching local estate agents in person to register an interest.

Online

Websites such as Gumtree, Spare Room, Open Rent, Rightmove will list up to date properties and show agents in the areas where you are looking. If you do not have use of a smart phone you could access a PC at a library. Searching online will show you what properties are available in the area where you wish to move. If the rents are too expensive you can transfer your search to other areas which may be more affordable.

Word of mouth

It is worth letting your friends and family know that you are looking for a property. Friends could share your search by social media on your behalf, or may know someone looking for a tenant.

Shop windows, notice boards and local newspaper

Often private landlords will advertise locally.

Estate Agents

It is beneficial to represent yourself and speak to agents directly, to show your interest in a property. You should focus on your strengths as a potential tenant. This may include a willingness or ability to move quickly, references from a past landlord, and/or the ongoing assistance from the Accommodation Liaison Officer by participation in the Tenancy Bond/ Deposit Scheme.

Please note the following guidance:

- 1. DO NOT PAY for any of these services.*
- 2. DO NOT SIGN any agreements or pay a 'holding fee' before discussing the property with a Housing Advisor.*
- 3. Make sure that the rent is affordable.*
- 4. DO take account of the Local Housing Allowance.*
- 5. Check all paperwork you are given and get legal advice if you are unsure.*



Types of private rented accommodation

There are various types of accommodation available to suit different housing needs:

Room in a Shared House

A room is let in a house or flat with shared use of the kitchen, bathroom and lounge. Sometimes the landlord is resident and there may or may not be other tenants.

Lodgings

These are rooms in a landlord's own home where you can either use the kitchen or have meals prepared for you.

Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)

This accommodation is covered by legislation which requires them to have adequate facilities, safety procedures, and inspections by the Private Sector Housing Team.

Bedsits/ Studio flat

Usually a bedroom/ living room with its own cooking facilities, while the bathroom and toilet may be shared with others.

Self-contained House/ Flat/ Maisonette/ Studio

You have the property to yourself, often known as 'exclusive possession'.

The size of the accommodation you choose should reflect your household needs and budget.

Finding a room to rent

Most vacant rooms will be advertised online. Here is a selection of websites which offer rooms:

- www.idealflatmate.co.uk
- www.roomlets.rentals
- www.spareroom.co.uk
- www.roomsforlet.co.uk
- uk.easyroommate.com
- www.gumtree.com
- www.roombuddies.co.uk

There is usually an option to register with Facebook or with an email account. You will be able to search for a vacancy, and on some sites you will be able to place your own advert, for landlords to contact you.

Disclaimer: This list is representative of the choice of sites available for seeking accommodation. EHDC does not favour or endorse any particular site. Other similar websites are available.



Stay Safe

When dealing with information obtained from the internet it is best to act with caution and follow the safety advice below sourced from spareroom.com.

Do:

- Find out the exact address of the property, and tell someone where (and when) you're going before a viewing
- Ask to see a copy of the tenancy agreement before committing to a room
- Ask for the name of the Property Redress Scheme they're registered with (all agencies have to be registered with one) and check out their registered details
- Use a free online sort-code checker before making payments by bank transfer (this will show you which financial institution the account is registered with). You should never make any payments to a pre-paid card issuer.
- Be vigilant, and use your common sense

Don't:

- Don't trust adverts that seem too good to be true - i.e. if a property is unusually cheap for the area, or in very good condition for a low price
- Never sign or pay anything before viewing the room
- Never pay anything via Western Union, Moneygram or any other anonymous money transfer system (even if you're asked to send money to a friend first and show the receipt as proof you have the money - the receipt is all someone needs to claim the cash)
- Don't pay anything without seeing a tenancy agreement
- Never feel pressurised to take something if it feels wrong - there will be other rooms available
- Don't accept an emailed scan of ID from someone you haven't met. You need to see the actual ID in the presence of the person whose ID it is
- Don't use any contact details hidden in ad descriptions or images. Stick to the SpareRoom messaging system till you're confident who you're dealing with.

Next steps - Found a property?

It is important not to delay once you find an available property. You should take steps to contact the landlord or agent yourself and arrange to view the property.

During the viewing you should have a regard for the general condition of the property and how it could fit your specific needs. The viewing is a chance to ask questions about the area, the property itself and what is required from you to secure the property.

If you wish to proceed with the tenancy you should contact a Housing Advisor.



Top tips for a successful viewing

When viewing a property, the landlord/ agents will be assessing whether you fit their criteria as a tenant just as much as you are considering if the property suits your needs.

Here are some top tips to make a good impression at the viewing, and ensure that find out what you need to know:

Presentation

It is important that you arrive on time to the appointment and show yourself in the best light.

How you present yourself will give the landlord/ agent insight into how you intend to treat the property as a potential tenant. If you would feel more comfortable take a friend, family member or someone who can support you.

Ask the right questions

You should make sure that you use the time at the viewing effectively, to decide if the property would suit your needs. You could ask about the heating system, who is responsible for common areas? What is included such as white goods, the length of the tenancy available, what kind of tenancy agreement is being offered, the local amenities, local schools and any additional charges in the case of a room etc.

Talk business

You also need to come away knowing exactly what is required to secure the property and if they are considering other tenants at the same time? You should clarify if there are any fees, what they cover and if they are refundable if you do not get the property?

Sometimes a credit check is required, you can ask exactly what they are looking for, which is useful before you pay for this service. It is usual for agents to expect one month's rent in advance and some form of security deposit. You should ask the amounts they require and at what stage these would be payable?

Promote your strengths

It is important that you let the landlord/ agent know what would make you a good tenant as there are a lot of people looking for a property. Positive factors may include having a guarantor, landlord reference, wanting to secure a long term let, ability to move quickly, a large deposit or paying rent in advance. If you have been offered a Bond or Deposit from your Housing Advisor you should let the agent know that you are working with the Accommodation Liaison Officer at EHDC. They can then approach the team for more information if they wish.

Consider your answers

It is likely that the landlord/ agent will ask for information about your circumstances. It is useful if you have thought about this in advance, so you can decide how much you are willing to share. Why are you looking to move? Why are you receiving help from the local authority? Have you had rent arrears before? Who will be living at the property?

You should be prepared that there will be other people viewing the property and therefore if you are interested, you should communicate this in writing (usually by email) to the landlord/ agent as soon as possible. If you are offered the property you should contact your Housing Advisor immediately.

Final word

Finding suitable affordable accommodation in the private rented sector is difficult, however, if you can play to your strengths and cast the net wide enough you will find a property.

If you do have to change you search criteria, you can pick up the search again, once you have secured a home in the short term. This may require saving for a further deposit, improving your credit rating, finding work or holding a successful tenancy to get a positive landlord reference.



More information

If you would like helpful advice about finding suitable accommodation please contact
**Housing Options Team or
Accommodation Liaison Officer**
on 01730 234314 or email
amelia.mahler@easthants.gov.uk

East Hampshire District Council is keen to work with as many landlords and letting agents as possible, in the local area.

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